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AUTHOR Ackerman, Betty J.
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ABSTRACT

Gaining an awareness of the needs of children of divorce and how children achieve resilience should help students become well-adjusted and productive. This paper explores ways in which school systems and school counselors can meet the needs of these children. It portrays the effects of divorce on children by drawing on the literature, observations by educators, and support group efforts. Some of the effects of divorce include diminished self-esteem, self-image, and coping skills. Such children tend to be withdrawn, aggressive, and have trouble concentrating. The study focuses on current efforts in the schools to help children of divorce and explores the needs of these children during and after divorce. It examines whether peer mediation can help these children and what administrators and staff can do. Suggestions are presented of ways in which educators can encourage children of divorce to lead secure and productive lives; some characteristics of resilient children are also detailed. Intervention programs for these children can include group therapy, peer therapy, classroom meetings, individual counseling, and play therapy. It is noted that proper evaluation is an important component of these programs. Contains 27 references. (RJM)

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EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN, TRAITS OF RESILIENCY AND SCHOOL INTERVENTION

BETTY J. ACKERMAN

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The program research that has been conducted in this study was completed to gain an understanding of how our school systems and, more specifically, school counselors could better meet the needs of children of divorce. Problems faced by young people have became more apparent, serious and troubling. The numbers were rising nationwide of children living in a stressful environment because of divorce.

This study portrayed the effects of divorce on children through the literature, observations by educators, and support group efforts. It also portrayed resilient qualities found in a most diverse environment. An overall review was given on the challenge we, as educators, face and effects of programs used in our school systems.

DEFINITIONS:

Children of divorce: In this study, children of divorce are children ages five through eighteen that have parents that are in divorce proceedings or have obtained a divorce. These children may be living with one parent or divided living arrangements are made with both parents.

Resiliency: Unusually good adaptation in the face of severe stress; resilient children have learned to expect and cope with difficulties in their lives.

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Peer Mediation: This is mediation conducted by trained students to work out concerns of students. Peer mediation reduces office referrals, suspensions and possible family disputes.

Support Groups: Support groups are group counseling techniques with trained group leaders dealing with topics of divorce, grief, study skills, peer pressure, anger management, etc.

At-Risk Student: Students who are considered to be at-risk of dropping out of school for a wide variety of reasons prior to graduation. Reasons include pregnancy, substance abuse, academic deficiencies, gang involvement, and divorce.

Developmental Stages: Developmental stages are the periods in a child's life and the experiences of physical, social, emotional and mental phases he/she goes through at that time.

Self-esteem: The value one places on what he/she believes to be true about oneself.

BACKGROUND:

We have reached a time in our society that an awareness of children's needs has come to the headlines. My own experience was having a stay-at-home mom, farmer dad, and siblings to have many conflicts. I learned (or earned) my place in life and knew what was expected.

Children of divorce often lacked this stable environment. They were often saddled with responsibilities that were not age appropriate. Their concerns and feelings were often neglected

by those that were going through the divorce. School counselors need better understanding of this at-risk group and be better prepared to identify the needs of children of divorce.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY:

Gaining an awareness of the needs of children of divorce and children becoming more resilient should help students become well-adjusted and productive in the years ahead. The research on what children of divorce (COD) were going through at different ages aids to inform educators of the signs of stress and needs of the students. The school is the one stable environment that children can rely on.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Are the schools meeting the needs of children of divorce?
2. Can peer mediation be beneficial to COD?
3. What are the needs of COD during/after divorce?
4. What do administrators and staff deal with in COD situations?
5. How can we help to encourage COD's to lead secure and productive lives?
6. What does resilient children have that non-resilient children do not have?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

SOURCES:

The key descriptors to begin this research included: children of divorce, resiliency, support groups, and at-risk children. As the research progressed, the following terms were used as well: children in stress, stressful environments and academic deficiencies. Preliminary sources consulted in this study included: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), First Search: EBSCO (Internet) and Social Issues Resources Service (SIRS). The bibliography first used was in the book "Counseling Children" by Thompson and Rudolph and referred to Wallerstein as a source.

REVIEW:

Statistically, the divorce rate has become a relevant issue. Between 1960 and 1980, the U.S. divorce rate jumped by nearly 250 percent. It has since leveled off at a rate that is by far the highest in the industrialized world. About half of all marriages undertaken today will end in divorce (Galston, 1996). Before reaching adulthood, around half of today's children will go through a marital rupture period (Zinsmeister, 1996). Since 1960, the number of children directly effected by divorce has jumped from 485,000 to one million a year. The percentage of children living in mother-only households has more than doubled. About forty percent of such children have not seen their fathers during the past year (Galston, 1996). A small majority of those who experienced a divorce eventually

ended up in a step-family, but well over a third of them may experience the extra trauma of seeing that second marriage breakup (Zinsmeister, 1996).

Where did this leave the children? Children were the innocent and sometimes silent victims. The parents being consumed with the problems of the relationship, often neglected the children's needs. Divorcing parents sought help through individual and group counseling or through organized helping groups, such as Parents Without Partners. In past years, children of divorce got little direct help. In most instances, the children were told as little as possible about family concerns and were instructed to keep the breakup secret for as long as possible (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996).

Professor Jeanne Bise-Lewis surveyed almost 700 junior high school students, asking them to rate a number of life events in terms of stressfullness. The only thing students ranked as more stressful than divorce was death of a parent or close family member. Parental divorce had a higher rating than a death of a friend, being physically hit by a parent, feeling that no one liked them, or being seriously injured (Zinsmeister, 1996).

Many mothers and fathers have badly underestimated how damaging household dissolution can be to their children. Children of divorce were effected socially, economically, psychologically and even legally. Children were subject to separation from one parent and formation to a new and different relationship with the other. A change in the family economic

status, possibly a change in a home and school environment, different parenting styles, and custody battles. Sometimes a totally different lifestyle created feelings that may be positive or negative. Children have their own needs that exist quite apart from those of their parents.

Leading researchers, such as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), noted that the primary peril of divorce was adverse effect on a child's development. Numerous studies have suggested that the child's developmental level was related to the reaction that followed the separation. In Wallerstein's research, sixty divorcing families were followed with a total of 131 children for ten years. These studies suggested that infants responded mostly to the emotional reaction of their caretaker. Mothers or fathers under stress conveyed their feelings to the infant through their handling and verbal communication. Very young children seemed to have many of their needs met regardless of the stress of the caretaker. This seemed true because very young children were dependant and demanded attention to their needs. Preschoolers (age three to five) had little understanding of the family situation because of their limited cognitive development. They often felt frightened and insecure, experienced nightmares, and regressed to more infantile behaviors. School-age children, who had more advanced cognitive and emotional development saw the situation more accurately. Children, age six to eight, often believed that the divorce was their fault. (If I had not been bad, Dad would not have left.) Children at this age often held

unrealistic hope for the family to reconcile. They may have felt lost, rejection, guilt and loyalty conflicts. Age nine to twelve was a time when children were developing rapidly and relied on their parents for stability. They became very angry at the parent they blamed for the divorce. Sometimes they took on a parental role as they worried about their troubled parents. Because of their distress, these children developed somatic symptoms, engaged in troublesome behaviors, or experienced a decline in academic achievement.

The parents' divorce during children's adolescent years brought a different set of developmental problems. Young people at this age were striving for independence and exploring their own sexuality. They needed structure and guidance in dealing with their sexuality. They also were worried about their own relationships and repeating their parents' mistakes (Wallerstein, 1980).

In her ten year follow-up, Wallerstein (1984) found that children who were very young at the time of the divorce seemed to have suffered less. They remembered less about those events at that time in their life. There were other factors which influenced the effects of the divorce on the child. These included the amount of attention and conflict in the home, the length of time the child had lived with the conflict, the parents' reactions to the conflict, and the parents' personal adjustment to the divorce and the resumption of parenting roles.

Wallerstein (1984) stated the psychological tasks of the child seemed to describe specific issues that children of divorce must successfully resolve. They were as follows:

Acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture: It was suggested that supportive counseling techniques including listening, reflection, clarification, problem solving. Stress-reduction techniques were appropriate for working with children through this task.

Disengaging from parental conflict and distress and resuming customary pursuits: Parents must work to help children keep their lives in order and not allow the divorce to overshadow all their activities. The children must be allowed to continue, as much as possible, in the same routine as before the separation.

Resolution of loss: Divorce brought not only loss of the parent, but also often loss of familiar surroundings and possibly lifestyle the child was accustomed. Wallerstein (1983) suggested that a consistent pattern of visitation by the absent parent and an emphasis on forming a new and positive relationship could help children through this stage. Role-playing, puppetry, drawing, writing, charades, and other techniques could encourage children to express their feelings. Individual and group sessions focused on self-esteem may be helpful.

Resolving anger and self-blame: Intense anger at one or both parents was characteristic of children of divorce, especially older children. Recurring of the anger and task of forgiveness

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go hand in hand with the growing emotional maturity of the child. As the anger gave away, the child was able to obtain both closure and relief. Opportunities to express their feelings either within the family, in a school setting or outside agencies, had been helpful.

Accepting the permanence of the divorce: Wallerstein (1983) had concluded that the child of divorce faced an even more difficult task of accepting permanence than the bereaved child. The child who experienced death knew the death could not be undone. The living presence of two parents gave the child a hope that the parents would get back together.

Assuming realistic hopes regarding relationships: During the adolescent years, the child of divorce must resolve issues surrounding relationships. The child would need to allow themselves to get involved in relationships knowing full well that it might work or that it might fail. Doing so required that the child feel lovable and worthy. Children often felt rejected, unlovable and unworthy, because they felt guilty over the divorce or because they believed that one or both parents rejected them and cared little about their feelings and welfare. Wallerstein (1983) noted that some adolescents engaged in acting-out behavior (promiscuity, alcohol or drug abuse) which indicated low self-esteem. An important task for adolescents was realizing that they can love and be loved. They must learn to be open in relationships while knowing that divorce was possible.

Earlier research reported that boys shared more times of trauma from the divorce during the developmental years than girls did. Also, they found a "sleeper effect" in girls a problem that became more apparent as they entered young adulthood.

In Wallerstein's (1984) overview of the subjects, initially, two-thirds of all the children showed symptoms of stress, and half thought their lives had been destroyed by the divorce. Five years later, over a third were still seriously disturbed (even more disturbed than they had been initially), and another third were having psychological difficulties. A surprisingly large number remained angry at their parents. After a decade, forty-five percent of the children were doing well, fourteen percent were succeeding in some areas but failing in others, and forty-one percent were still doing quite poorly. This last group was entering adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women. In addition to emotional problems and depression, many felt sorrow over their childhoods and fear about their own marriage and child bearing prospects. About a third of the group had little or no ambition at the ten-year mark. Many expressed a sense of powerlessness, neediness, and vulnerability. Most of the ones that had reached adult age regarded their parents' divorce as a continuing major influence in their lives.

In Wallerstein's (1984) middle-class sample, one-third of the girls with divorced parents became pregnant out of wedlock

and eight percent had at least two abortions. Two-thirds of the girls had a history of delinquency and almost thirty percent of the boys had been arrested more than once.

Zinsmeister (1996) stated that schooling was another problem area. Children exposed to divorce were twice as likely to repeat a grade and five times likelier to be expelled or suspended. Even in Wallerstein's middle-class sample, thirteen of the youngsters had dropped out of school altogether. Barely half of Wallerstein's subjects went on to college, far less than the eighty-five percent average for students in their high schools. Wallerstein (1984) concluded that sixty percent of the divorced-children in her study would fail to match the educational achievements of their fathers.

Divorce was second only to the distress suffered from the loss of a loved one through death. Some of the questions a child would have were: Who will take care of me? Will I be left alone? Where will I live? Will I still be able to be with both of you? What will happen if I get sick? Will we live in the same house? Who will feed me? Will I be with my brothers and sisters? Their first fear was abandonment (Salk, 1978).

When a child was left in a situation of great uncertainty, he felt helpless, frustrated and angry. His only relief came with direct expressions of aggression and destruction (Salk, 1978).

Some of the symptoms of children under stress were: sleeplessness, mentally drained, daydream, crying, muscle

weakness, physical exhaustion, lack of appetite, stomach aches, sad facial expressions, perhaps looks unkept, more highly susceptible to infections and illnesses, in general (Salk, 1978).

Children need the help of adults. Over one-third of the children felt the mother was entirely aware of their distress. Age nine and upward were acutely aware of lapses in parenting and felt aggrieved and neglected. Almost all nine to ten year old boys felt the father to be mostly unavailable to them. Older girls felt emotionally abandoned by their mothers. Less that ten percent of children received adult help from the community or family friends (Wallerstein, 1980).

Closeness to the family was identified in terms of five family types as follows: *one-parent cohesion* (where children also saw their single-parent family unit as close); *two-parent cohesion* (where children perceived close ties between themselves, both parents and their siblings); *divided* (where children perceived division between their parents and could attach themselves to either mother or father); *parent coalition* (where children perceived some family division, with one cohesive group formed by the parents and another by the children); and *isolated child* (where children perceived themselves as isolated within the family) (Cooper, Holman, & Braithwaite, 1983).

Questionnaires assessing children's self-esteem and perceptions of family happiness and support were administered to 467 fifth- and sixth-grade children. Teachers' knowledge of

family relationship was also measured. The results indicated that children from different family types experienced varying degrees of closeness and support. Furthermore, those children reporting little family support tended to score low level on self-esteem (Cooper, Holman, Braithwaite, 1983).

The connection of marital harmony and children's well-being was supported also by studies that relied on children's reports of the parents' relationship. Those who reported high incidence of parental or family conflict were more likely to show poor adjustment and low self-esteem, even where this conflict occurred several years earlier.

Results of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concepts scale provided reliable indices of self-esteem. Children from either one-parent or two-parent cohesive families were clearly less likely to report parent-child or total conflict and more likely to have fun with their families. Less parental conflict also was reported in two-parent cohesive families. By contrast, the divided family was characterized by higher degrees of conflict and by reduced enjoyment in family activities. Children from divided families appeared to have a less supportive home environment. Least family support seemed to be associated with those children who felt isolated within the family. This group was reported as having the highest parent-child conflict and were least likely to have fun with their families.

Research indicated that family cohesion, when measured through the child's perception of family relationships, has an

important influence on the development of self-concepts in children. Where children perceived conflict between parents or between themselves and their parents, lower self-esteem could be expected. Furthermore, the results clearly show that family structure alone did not have the most damaging effect on children's self-esteem. Broken homes need not yield broken lives. The quality of family life was crucial to the psychological well-being of the child.

Children who felt isolated from their families did not find their home environment supportive and happy. These children scored lowest on self-esteem and significantly, the parent-child relationship was the dominating variable in this case.

Resiliency

In order to understand how children of divorce became vulnerable when going through stressful life situations, one must understand the elements that make a child vulnerable or resilient.

Resiliency was defined as that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to school failure, substance abuse, mental health, and juvenile delinquency problems they were at great risk experiencing (Werner, 1992).

Resilient traits in children and young people helped them avoid, minimize, or overcome risk factors. Researchers identified five major categories of traits within individuals

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that helped them become resilient: *1.) Social competencies or the exhibition of pro-social behaviors;* these traits increased children's ability to find and keep healthy relationships with others. *2.) Well-developed problem-solving skills;* the ability to recognize social influences in the environment and make choices about those influences. *3.) Autonomy;* a strong sense of identity and worth; self-esteem and self-efficacy. *4.) Religious/Spiritual commitment;* a stable belief system. *5.) Sense of purpose of future* (Seligman, 1996).

Doing well led to higher self-esteem. In other words, teaching the power of positive thinking was not as effective in developing high self-esteem as teaching skills which helped change pessimism to optimism and helplessness to mastery (Seligman, 1996).

A definition of optimism is the ability to persevere in the face of adversity and overcome problems, or to be resilient and bounce back. This required having a positive, hopeful attitude as well as the ability to prove that what we did makes a difference. Seligman (1996) taught children that feelings were not caused by events, but by their own thinking habits, which could be changed.

Tips by Seligman (1996) in helping those who work with children were as follows:

**do not solve problems for children

**provide guidance, not answers

**do not be overcritical of children's attempts to find solutions

**model good problem-solving skills

**offer choices within clear structure

**be honest and realistic about praise

**criticize the behavior, not the person

**when in conflict with another adult, avoid verbal and physical aggression, the "silent treatment", or asking a child to take sides

In elementary schools, teachers reported that resilient children got along well with their classmates. They had better reasoning and reading skills than the high-risk children who developed problems, especially the girls (Werner, 1989).

By the time they graduated from high school, the resilient youth had developed a positive self-concept and an internal locus-of-control. Resilient girls were also more assertive, achievement-oriented and independent. The resilient boys and girls tended to grow up in families with four or fewer children with a space of two years or more between themselves and their siblings. Few had experienced prolonged separation from their primary caretaker during the first year of life. Resilient boys were often first-born sons who did not have to share their parents' attention with many additional children. There were some males in the family who would serve as role models. The resilient boys and girls also found emotional support outside their own families. They tended to have at least one, and usually several, close friends, especially the girls. Participation in extracurricular activities played an important part in the lives of the resilient youth (Werner, 1989).

The resilient high-risk boys and girls had fewer serious illnesses in the first two decades of life and recuperated quickly. In middle childhood, resilient boys and girls possessed adequate problem-solving and communication skills, and their perceptual-motor development was age-appropriate throughout childhood and adolescence. They displayed both masculine and feminine interests and skills.

In late adolescence, the resilient young had a more internal locus-of-control and more positive self-concept and more nurturant, responsible, and achievement-oriented attitude toward life than peers who had developed serious coping problems.

Also noted by Werner (1989) was that an individual was able to cope so long as the balance of risks, stressful life events, and protective factors were manageable. When risk factors and stressful life events outweighed the protective factors, even the most resilient individual would develop problems. These could be serious coping problems or of the less visible type, who symptoms were internalized, as with the stress-related health problems noted among some of the resilient males in their thirties.

Some of the protective factors noted were high activity level, a low degree of excitability and distress, and a high degree of sociability. When they entered elementary school, their classroom teachers observed their ability to concentrate on their assignments and noted their problem-solving and reading skills.

Usually these resilient children had a special hobby to share with a friend. These interests were not narrowly sex-typed; boys and girls alike excelled at such activities as fishing, swimming, and horseback riding.

The resilient children also found a great deal of emotional support outside their immediate family. They tended to be well liked by their classmates and had at least one close friend.

With the help of the support networks, the resilient children developed a sense of meaning in their lives and a belief that they could control their fate. Their experience in coping with and mastering stressful life events built an attitude of hopefulness that contrasted starkly with the feelings of helplessness and uselessness that were stated by their troubled peers.

Resilient children were robust, responsive, and had learned to trust. They tended to be more self-reliant than rejected and to draw on their own resources to meet their physical and emotion needs. They also appeared to form warmer and less hostile peer relations and to grow into more caring and responsible adults than rejected children. It was noted that maternal employment had no negative effects on the resilient children, and may have actually contributed to the competence and independence of the resilient girls.

The resilient boys thrived even in poor homes, if there was some structure, little crowding and little family discord, and if the father was present in the household. In summation,

resilient children appeared to derive from the life events and model in the household those traits that complement each sex: autonomy and independence for the resilient girls; caring and nurturance for the resilience boys; competence for both.

Protective factors modified a person's reaction to a situation that in ordinary circumstances led to maladaptive outcomes. Presence of an intact family unit in childhood and in adolescence, was a major protective factor in the lives in delinquent youth in the birth cohort who did not commit any offenses in early adulthood. Only one out of four grew up in a home where either the mother or father was absent for prolonged periods of time because of separation, desertion or divorce. Five of six among delinquent who went on to commit adult crimes came from families in which one parent was absent for long periods of time during their teens (Werner, 1992).

The fact remained that the divorce family in which the burden falls entirely, or mostly, on one parent was more vulnerable to stress, had limited economic and psychological reserves, and lacked the supporting and buffering presence of the other adult to help meet the crises of life (Wallerstein, 1980).

Intervention

Historically, the educational institutions intervened when society did not adequately handle the problems of its children and adolescents. Consequently, sex education, smoking education, drugs, etc., have all became the responsibility of

our schools during the past two decades. Now these schools were newly challenged by the problems that children of divorce present to the academic community.

A study done by Omizo & Omizo (1988) was to determine the efficacy of group counseling of adolescents from divorce families. More specifically, the study was designed to investigate the effects of participation in the group sessions on children's self-esteem and locus-of-control orientations (Omizo & Omizo, 1988).

The method involved sixty participates who were seventh- and eighth-graders from one intermediate school located in a lower-middle to middle-class suburban neighborhood. All children had parents who were divorced and had not remarried. The sixty participants (twenty-seven boys and thirty-three girls) ranged in age from eleven to fourteen years old (Omizo & Omizo, 1988).

The results indicated that adolescents that participated in the group sessions were significantly different from the adolescents in the control group on the posttest measures. The adolescents in the treatment group had high levels of self-esteem and had possessed a more internal perception of locus-of-control orientation. Experimental group participants had more internal locus-of-control perceptions on the Success Social, Failure Social, and Failure Domain than the control-group participants. The significant difference on the self-esteem variable was important because of the construct was related to the many other variables that contributed to the

academic, social and emotional successes. Individuals with higher levels of self-esteem seemed to be at an advantage in most situations. It seemed that being aware of one's feelings and being able to express them, giving and receiving positive feedback, and knowing that others were experiencing similar feelings and behaviors had a positive impact on the self-evaluations of the participants in the experimental groups.

Group counseling sessions seemed promising as a way to enhance self-esteem and internal locus-of-control orientation among adolescents from divorced families. It was an intervention strategy that could be used by the school counselor in his or her role as a group facilitator. Counselors would need little formal training and many adolescents could be helped. Enhanced self-esteem and a more internal locus-of-control orientation could assist adolescents in several areas.

Wallerstein (1980) stated that the anxieties generated in students by a major disruption in their lives could compromise their receptivity to learning, their willingness to experiment with new material, their ability to concentrate, and their overall attitude towards school.

The youngest children, in the early stages in mastering reading, may for this reason be most vulnerable to the disorganizing effort of family disruption, but for the older students, a continuing sense of achievement was also critical in determining attitudes toward school.

Teachers had the opportunity to observe and be familiar with these students' normal fluctuations in mood, capacity to concentrate, enthusiasm for learning, and interactions with peers and teachers. If the child's behavior changed in the classroom or playground, the teacher was able to observe such responses.

In many instances, the teacher did not know that the child's parents were divorcing. It has not been the custom of our society for parents to share matters of a personal nature to the school. Some of the teachers themselves, were divorced parents and this increased their sensitivity they had gained by observing their own children which enhanced the ability to recognize and meet the needs of students whose parents were divorcing.

At the time of Wallerstein's (1980) first series of teacher interviews, two-thirds of the children between kindergarten and twelfth grade were doing at least average academic work, and substantially more than half of this group were considered excellent students. Some problems in learning existed for the remaining one-third, of whom more than half were doing poor or failing work.

Teacher observations indicated that approximately two-thirds of all the students showed some notable changes in school. For more than half of the students, teachers reported a high level of anxiety. Children who used to fit in and do their work, now roamed about the room constantly, and in the process, began to interrupt classroom activities.

Parallel to a rise in concentration difficulties was substantial increase in daydreaming. As with the observation of anxiety, restlessness and decreased concentration, there were no significance in sex differences in the students who began to daydream substantially more after the separation. Teachers noted either considerable sadness or dependency in one-fifth of the students.

For children in their early school years, the ability to maintain concentration in school without substantial and enduring disruption was very strongly linked to the custodial parent's continued ability to handle the children without serious deterioration and to protect the children from the divorce turmoil. It was additionally helpful if the other parent was able to be comforting and sensitive to the child's needs.

The school setting served as a support system in diverse ways for different children at different ages. As with other support systems outside immediate and extended families, a child's ability to utilize the school for support in the midst of a crisis increased significantly with age. First, it was clear that the school was useful precisely because it provided structure in a child's life at a time when the major structure of his life, the family, was crumbling. Second, there was the support provided those children who enjoyed attending school and whose academic achievements sustained and nourished them. And third, some children were supported in school at a time of high stress by their close relationship with a friendly

teacher. It was important for the teacher who observed the continuing need of a child for reassurance to discuss the child's vulnerability with his parents before his progress in learning became seriously compromised. In short, those who were capable in seeking out the assistance or solace of others did so in a fairly wide circle. With boys and girls of all ages, there was significance between high academic achievement and good peer relationships.

Some students five years after the separation were involved in vandalism, including arson, at the school, which they had come to hate. They had been the children and adolescents historically labeled the products of "broken homes", seen in the school setting as failures and disruptive. They were the majority of the students who experienced the divorce of their parents, but they represented one group of such children desperately in need of a supportive network soon after the separation.

A divorce support group model was suggested where a student needs assessment survey was conducted at a comprehensive four-year public high school in northwest Ohio to determine the areas of student concerns. Many students from changed families expressed a need to understand the consequences of parental divorce and as a result of this expressed need, a support group was established for the interested students. The major goal of this group was to provide a safe place in which peers could discuss concerns and provide suggestions in dealing with problems that had arisen as

a result of parental divorce. Specific objectives were created to address the adjustment variables that may have contributed to adjustment concern of the adolescent participants (Studer & Allton, 1996).

Direct, indirect and preventive are approaches which school psychologists could readily employ or adapt for use in their schools to deal with the effects of separation of divorce. It was found that thirty-five life changing events in elementary age children which required social readjustment. The events of divorce and separation required the greatest amount of readjustment. Parents feared negative attitudes and repercussions from the school. They may have been reluctant to share personal information. Schools often feared intrusion into families personal realm and have been reluctant to request information which would provide guidance for school personnel to interact with and plan for the child in the school (Drake, 1979).

After determining the need to deal with the effects of separation and divorce, school psychologists could employ direct, indirect, or preventive approaches to enhance individual, family or school functioning.

An example of a direct approach was counseling groups composed of children from single parent homes experiencing difficulties related to separation.

In order to help both parents and children become more aware of each needs and adjustments and to establish more productive communication on issues of divorce, direct

intervention efforts by schools addressed the needs of children and parents of divorce or separation. Along with voluntary support groups for elementary and high school students a social awareness program was taught in conjunction with regular social studies curricula where issues involving divorce and children of divorce were prevented.

Another was the indirect approach where the goal for school personnel was to produce positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and educational approaches in order to improve the education and school life of children.

Another approach was preventive approaches. Children from intact homes may react to the instability of other families. The school psychologist may want to encourage the development of or become directly involved with preventive programs such as the one formulated by Holdahl and Caspersen (1977) designed to help all children to deal with inevitable family changes including not only separations and divorces, but also death, births, and moves. Their program was based on research by Coddington (1972) suggesting that stress brought about by family change has a serious impact on the lives of children and on national and local statistics indicating that significant numbers of children were experiencing the change of separation or divorce of their parents (Graver, 1986).

Goals of the project were to support students who were experiencing family changes and to provide voluntary educational experience available to all students that would

prepare them to understand and cope with the dimensions of family change.

Research showed that planned groups helped normal children adjust to the disruptive changes in family structures. An education or support group model consisted of four parts: background for group programs, materials/activities, examine support group for education or both, and references. Some of the emotional reactions to divorce were grief, anger, depression, fear of future, and guilt. Some of the behavior reactions: withdrawal, aggression, temperamental outburst, and impaired concentration. Some of the interpersonal relationships were change in residence results to new friends, school, church, and loss (Graver, 1986).

Their personal identity changed as the new family adjusted to the new situations, two households and less parental interactions. Methods that led to better adjustment were open family communications, children's need to express feelings, discuss problems.

Children of divorce said that if a counselor would ask them to talk about how they felt, it would be helpful. Sixty-four percent said they would rank counseling groups the same. Group programs could be effective for a variety of reasons. The need to belong to a small group with whom they could share thoughts and feelings emerging was a universal need in their uprooted, mobile and mass-oriented society. The need for peer validation was met by meeting in groups (Graver, 1986).

One intervention was a systematic ten session program of education counseling and peer support which provided information effective coping skills and rebuilding of self-esteem for adolescents and children (ages eleven to eighteen years). Limitations of this program was that it did not cure deep seated emotional problems. The program was to help students develop strategies that enabled them to cope more effectively with conflict and frustration, refocus on academics social, personal pursuits.

A promotion of self-esteem and self-efficacy in a young person was probably the key ingredient in any effective intervention process. Intervention programs need to focus on children and youths who appeared most vulnerable because they lacked some of the essential personal resources or social bonds that buffer chronic adversity or stress.

The strength with which a child emerged from a crisis situation depended on the appropriateness and flexibility of his or her coping strategies.

Understandably, issues of self-image were abundant. Adolescents depended on their external world to offer a positive realistic self-image and a believable set of purposes and expectations for eventual self-evaluation.

If school counselors were to effectively facilitate growth in their adolescent population, they must understand the students' unique developmental level. Group counseling was often the most satisfactory method providing support to

students identified. Their responses tended to be primarily reflections, clarifications, linking and redirections.

In conclusion, the many students who were experiencing the effects of divorce deserved to be supported by the efforts of their counselors. Research revealed that these students could better cope with the psychological issues of divorce when they experienced the hope, appropriate information, and support that could emerge from a counseling program. Understanding the traits of children of divorce and what made a resilient child would be beneficial to the ever-growing population of children of divorce.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATIONS

The Kansas State Board of Education has defined its mission for Kansas education to be:

"To prepare each person with the living, learning, and working skills and values necessary for caring, productive, and fulfilling participation in our evolving, global society." (Guidance Communications Council Task Force, 1993).

It is important for this mission to be carried out while including "at-risk" students. Unfortunately, an increasing number of students are included in the at-risk population. The divorce phenomenon is often implicated as a major problem underlying this increase.

The counselor can play a role with this at-risk population by focusing on children of divorce. A comprehensive school counseling program is likely to contain elements necessary to provide the students with the skills necessary within the four domains (personal, social, educational and career) to become resilient, productive adults. It is important to identify the needs of the children of divorce early on.

ISSUES FACING CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND EDUCATORS

Disruption of the family unit effected self-esteem, self-image, and coping skills. Children experience grief, anger, loss, depression, loneliness, and self-blame. They tended to be withdrawn, aggressive, and had trouble concentrating.

An intervention program should contain the elements that would strengthen children facing the stress of separation.

These resilient qualities would include: *strong support,*(family, peers, school, or community); *adequate problem-solving skills, communication skills, age appropriate perceptual-motor development, positive self-concept, a more nurturant, responsible and achievement attitude.* Resilient children learn to trust. They have rules and structure to maintain stability. Confidence and competence was important to achieve.

The program would also contain elements addressing the concerns of the teachers and administration, and how each could identify behaviors of children going through family separation. A well-informed staff can benefit the learning ability of the student by recognizing the signs of stress and appropriate methods to utilize. The school personnel needs information to identify these concerns and be able to discern between inappropriate behavior and behavior as a result of the divorce. Realizing their own attitudes of divorce and how it effects their students are very important. The teacher could be very understanding of the separation or very "put off" by it. If the staff is informed, attention to the child experiencing stress from separation can be addressed early on. The adult support system can be in place prior to the need.

NEED ASSESSMENT

A program that would serve the needs of children of divorce, first, a determination of whether there is a need for a program in the school system.

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Are there currently programs available in the community that those experiencing divorce can attend?

Is there a high percentage of divorce in the area?

Is there support for a program addressing needs of children experiencing divorce established in the school system?

This essential step is done by a needs assessment instrument such as a survey or interview with parents, staff, and students. A few questions on this phase could be:

1. *(for the student)* Do you feel that your parents understand how you feel while they are going through divorce?
2. *(for the parent)* Do you feel your child is accepting and adapting to your separation/divorce?
3. *(for the staff/administration)* Have you noticed a change in behavior with children of divorce?

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

School Needs

Keeping school policy in mind, a program is outlined to address goals necessary to assist the children of divorce in achieving success in the personal, social, educational and career domains. Divorce, until recent years, has been a taboo issue. Therefore, access to information about divorce and behaviors associated with divorce, recordkeeping requirements, non-custodial access and involvement, confidentiality and referrals are some of the concerns to be addressed, which may be more novel in some rural school districts.

Availability of information can be disseminated through handouts, books/pamphlets, teacher inservice programs, and one-

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on-one conferences. These sources should contain information about the divorce process (custody issues, individual responsibilities, living arrangements), identifying stress caused by separation, how the stress effects the various developmental stages, methods of support for the individual, and where to refer the student when necessary.

In reviewing the developmental stages of the child and needs of children of divorce, the following is often suggested:

Preschool children (3-5) display fear, denial, aggression, guilt, and self-blame. They are very vulnerable because they are at the age that parents may feel it necessary to explain why their family is disrupted and why daddy is not living with them at the time.

Young School Age children (6-8) understand time better (daddy will be here on the weekend). They experience grief, yearning for the absent parent, anger at custodial mother, conflicting loyalties, fantasizes reconciliation.

Older children (9-12) understand shame. They tend to expend energy into activities, display anger, have a shaken sense of identity, and experience somatic symptoms (headaches, stomachaches).

Adolescent children (13-18) experience loneliness and depression, have a fear of isolation, worry about sex and marriage because of the example in their parents, become angry, more helpful as a family member because of the added responsibilities, tenancy to fail to cope, and need a role model (Wallerstein, 1980).

School policy is to address the issue of the non-custodial parent. This is a legal mandate. However, support of both parents is necessary for the child to achieve resilience. Therefore, that which is required meets the child's needs in this case. Research has shown that the father's involvement, or a father image, can be beneficial for boys during the developmental stage (Werner, 1992). A method of informing both parents is vital in most instances. In cases of abuse or threatening situations, other considerations may be followed. In this instance, the best interest of the child has a legal priority.

Recommended school policies addressing non-custodial parents according to James Austin (1992) are as follows: the school should involve both parents; maintain information on both parents, such as phone numbers, addresses, work information; both parents attend IEP; keep both parents informed of any concerns about their child; have support groups; and inservice education for teachers.

In handling student's needs dealing with stress of separation, multiple approaches to address various stages of the grief/loss process need to be established. Several emotions the student may be experiencing are to be evaluated and validated. Methods for the counselor to utilize are group counseling, peer counseling, individual counseling classroom presentations and play therapy. All of these techniques would provide information needed regarding the divorce process and stages of the divorce experience for children.

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Group Counseling

Group counseling is often the most satisfactory method of providing support to students identified (Coffman & Roark, 1988). Group work can facilitate self-awareness and skill development. It can enable students to regain a sense of community and belongingness, while inspiring confidence and renewed hope (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989). The need to share thoughts and feelings as they work through the uprooting of their family is likely to be facilitated by small group membership. A group experience can be the one "safe" place to vent frustrations and the loss. The students have a need for peer validation which can be accomplished by meeting in groups.

A few sample goals for the group follow:

1. Group members will acquire an understanding of methods of reconciling differences and coping with divorce. *(Respect the views of others in conflict situations; cope successfully with stress; identify the steps in conflict resolution)*
2. Groups members will develop an awareness of the uniqueness of self. *(State both positive and negative feelings; identify behavior admired in others and parents; discuss physical and emotional factors as they relate to different stages of divorce)*
3. Group members will develop skills for interacting with others. *(Identify ways in which he/she helps as a member of the family; identify sources and effects of peer pressure;*

demonstrate coping skills acceptable to self and others (Guidance Communications Council Task Force, 1995).

The counselor serves in a capacity that enables him/her to integrate the contributions of teachers, administrators, parents, educational specialists, and the students themselves (Walz, 1988). The group will have leaders to steer the group discussions, yet the group will have plenty of latitude.

Successful implementation of a group counseling method is dependent upon the support of building and district administrators, teachers, and parents. The administrators provide and arrange for adequate time, facilities, and materials needed to design the program. The teachers and staff work one-on-one with the students on a daily basis. They can provide insight as to the occurrence of behaviors and academic abilities. They would have to be flexible enough to allow students time to participate in group sessions. Parents would have to be open and honest enough to admit that there is a concern and the group counseling method could benefit his/her child.

(See appendix for sample forms for the process of notification to parents and staff.)

Peer Counseling

Most researchers indicate peer support has great potential. When teens are in trouble, they tend to go to peers (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989). A peer support group can develop positive self-image, aid adjustment to new situations, provide

emotional balance, reduce isolation, provide positive role models and give reliable feedback (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989).

The peer helper becomes more psychologically mature, exhibit greater self-awareness, and improves in perspective-taking capacity (Painter, 1989). Therefore, trained peer helpers are more effective. The goal for a peer counseling program is to establish a specially selected and trained group of the student population which serves as a liaison between the adult and student community. Also, it may supplement and complement the services available from the professional counseling staff (Painter, 1989).

A few objectives may include providing peer role modeling to students of all ages; enhancing self-esteem among students of all ages through interaction with peer counselors; reducing stress among students by providing helpers who are more readily available or are seen as more accessible; increasing communication of needs and feeling between students and adults; and providing positive peer pressure in prevention oriented activities (Painter, 1989).

These objectives are aimed generally for at-risk students. However, children of divorce are often included whether or not there is justification. Matching up peer helper with a student experiencing separation, may be the support the student needs to achieve resiliency.

Support from the staff is necessary for the peer program to flourish. In this regard, communication is vital. Peer helpers seem to function better when allowed to attend to the

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needs of the students. Handouts and information on the peer helper program keep the teachers informed. This may be beneficial by improving teacher awareness. A sponsored "appreciation week" can be planned to acknowledge those who have supported the program. Planned socials (pizza parties) can be planned for the helpers to enable them to pool their experiences. This provides important information to program supporters and an opportunity for participants to learn from them.

Individual Counseling

There is also a need for individual counseling. Some students may need more intensive direction or attention than is available in support groups or developmental education strategies. He/She may be a referral from a teacher, parent or student. In this way, individual counseling is a way to identify the concern.

A counselor's schedule must be flexible to allow individuals to be seen as necessary. Children of divorce may be experiencing behavior in the classroom that the teacher feels inappropriate or unlikely for the particular student. The teacher may not be aware that the child is experiencing a family that is separating. Letting the teacher know this may result in their renewed effort and personal therapy can be delayed. Of course, individual counseling often provides an opportunity for the child to reveal their concerns. Children of divorce seem to be reassured by this strategy. There may be

a need to include the parents in the individual sessions. The child must feel that although the family unit is disrupted, he/she is still loved and was not to blame or caused the separation.

Goals for individual counseling children of divorce are to aid the student in identifying concerns he/she is experiencing and learn how to achieve resiliency in times of stress. Also, it provides the counselor an opportunity to support and affirm the child.

Classroom Meetings

Classroom meetings and discussions in the schools can help meet the needs of children of divorce. While this is usually done as a group, the whole class may not have experienced divorce. "Outsiders" can possibly indicate another point of view or alternatives. The counselor can take precautions and keep focus on the issue at hand and allow the discussion to be productive. It should not be abuse by the student wanting the attention.

These meetings can be open-ended or problem-solving. They are to help the children feel loved and worthwhile. The meetings can be adapted to the age and developmental level of the children involved (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996).

Open-ended meetings are used to discuss anything relevant to the children's lives in order to stimulate understanding and thinking. Topics may include "What is a friend?" "What are responsibilities you have as a family member?" "What would you

do if you saw a child being abused?" The counselors job is to remain non-judgmental and direct the discussion in a way that stimulates thinking and helps the children set goals, look at consequences, and make plans. All children are encouraged to express their opinions (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996).

A behavior problem-solving meeting can be used to encourage the group to help one of its members solve a behavior problem, such as aggression. The group can help think of ways to handle the conflict. They may be able to express how the child's actions affects them personally. Children often can decide on better methods for handling conflict than adults can.

Play Therapy

Play therapy can be incorporated into most counseling approaches and is a primary method for working with children ages two through twelve years, because of their limited cognitive development and ability to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Children can attempt to understand the adult world through their play (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996).

The counselor takes an active role in determining the focus of the session, whether it is understanding parents' actions throughout the separation, expressing their own emotions about the divorce, or having extra responsibilities at home. Play therapy can be a way to gain insight of the child's world at home and at school.

The counselor should listen to the child's comments closely. The child in play is focusing on thoughts, feelings,

fantasies and environment. It teaches the child more appropriate behavior through role-playing.

In selecting play media, counselors should consider the child's age, needs and the purposes of the play therapy. With children experiencing the stress of separation, some of the items would include dolls, dollhouses, puppets, clay, punching toys, blocks, soldiers, trucks, hammers, soft balls, markers, crayons and various board games. With these items, the child can assimilate behavior and feelings that they may not be able to express verbally. A counselor can take these observations and redirect the child's pattern of thinking and acting. Play therapy can also be used to vent pent-up emotions. The counselor will need to be flexible and keep in mind the safety of the child and self (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996).

Parental Relationship

In all phases of the counseling process, the parental relationship is vital. Parents are sometimes so involved with their immediate concerns (court hearings, financial situation, housing, and own state of mind), that the child's needs are neglected. Emphasizing parental awareness to the child's concerns is necessary to the well-being of the child.

The age of the student should be considered when deciding the degree of involving the parents. High school students may feel parents are already too involved with their life and just need a place to express themselves. They may just need a "sounding board" and reassurance.

The primary school student's focus is somewhat smaller and may feel that all the world revolves around them and it is, therefore, their fault that the parents separated. Parents need to be involved to reassure the students of the nature of the separation and reassured their love for the child.

The parental relationship is a sensitive area. Some parents do not want the school to be aware of their private life. They may feel it will prejudice the teachers against their children. They may be too proud to admit their failure of the marriage. These concerns will effect the child's freedom to talk about his/her own feelings. Care should be given when approaching parents about the concerns of their children.

Goals for the parental relationship with the counseling program include having an atmosphere that the parents feel non-threatened to freely reveal the concerns of their child to the support staff at the school. A systematic method of communication is necessary to keep parents informed of the programs and well-being of the student involved.

EVALUATION

Well-planned, supported, and executed evaluation is another essential component for a successful program. There should be both formative and summative evaluation of the methods. Formative evaluation is important for keeping the program on track and responding to the needs of those participating in the counseling program. Constant evaluation

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will result in changes made early on and improve the program (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989).

Summative evaluation is important to give specific information about the overall success of the programs in attaining the goals set out. The areas to evaluated should be closely related to the original goals of the program (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989).

Another step in the evaluation process is to ensure that the school policies are upheld and enriched by the program. Evaluation is to find strengths and weaknesses in the program for the benefit of the children and facilitator. The goals set out for the group counseling sessions must follow school philosophy. There is sufficient resource materials available to meet the needs of the program. The counseling sessions delivered are based upon assessed needs of the individual student. A systematic approach is used to help the student attain the necessary information and goals of "surviving the divorce"?

It is also necessary to demonstrate accountability through the measured effectiveness of presentation of the program and performance of the staff. A collective effort of opinions from the students, staff, administrators and parents could be developed through a survey or interviews.

The outcomes should include effective and satisfying progress in academic, personal, and social learning, development, and achievement. There should be success in school and graduation with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

values that lead to success in post secondary education and/or employment and living (Capuzzi & Gross, 1989). The children experiencing divorce should be able to recognize the qualities of resiliency and the knowledge of acquiring these qualities.

Following is a poem that conveys the need for someone to listen carefully and take an interest.

PLEASE HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING

Don't be fooled by me.
Don't be fooled by the face I wear.
For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks.
Masks that I am afraid to take off.
But none of them are me.
Pretending is an art that's second nature to me.
But don't be fooled.
I give the impression that I am secure,
That all is sunny and unruffled with me,
Within as well as without.
That confidence is my name and coolness my game,
And that I need no one.
Don't believe me.
Please!

My surface may be smooth,
But my surface is my mask.
My ever concealing mask.
Beneath dwells the real me.
In confusion and fear,
In loneliness.

I idly talk with you in the smooth tones of surface chatter.
I tell you everything that's really nothing,
Of what's crying within me.
So, when I'm going through my routine,
Please don't be fooled by what I'm saying.
Please listen carefully,
and try to hear what I'm not saying.
But what I'd like to be able to say.

Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging,
Each time you try to understand because you really care,
My heart begins to grow wings.
Very small, feeble wings,
but wings.

With your sympathy and sensitivity,
and your power of understanding,
you can breathe life into me.
I want you to know how important you are to me.
How you can be a part of the person that is me,
if you choose to.
Please choose to.
Do not pass me by.

It will not be easy for you.
My sense of worthlessness builds strong walls.
The nearer you approach to me,
the blinder I may strike back.
I fight against the very thing I cry out for.
But I am told that love is stronger that strong walls.
This is my only hope.

Who am I, you may wonder?
I am someone you know very well.
I am a hurting member of your family,
I am the person sitting beside you in this room,
I am every person you meet on the street.
Please don't believe my mask.
Please speak to me, share a little of yourself with me.
At least recognize me.
Please.
Because you care.

Author Unknown
Condensed and Revised

APPENDICES

Appendix A

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

I give my child _____ permission to participate in a Children of Divorce support group. The group will begin on _____ and end approximately twelve weeks later. It will meet once each week during the regular school day for approximately forty-five minutes.

_____

Parent Signature

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LETTER TO TEACHERS

Date: _____

To: _____

From: _____

A support group will soon be started for children whose parents have recently separated or divorced, or for those who are still struggling with parental separation issues. If you are aware of any children in your class who would benefit from such a group, please list their names below. You will be notified about the dates and time the group will be meeting.

Students' Names:

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LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

A Children of Divorce support group is being formed at _____ School for students in grades _____. The group is open to children who have recently experienced parental separation or to those who still resist accepting the situation. The groups usually consist of four to ten children who have had similar feelings and experiences.

We will cover issues such as changes in the family that occur as a result of divorce, living in two houses, the grieving process, legal issues, and stepparenting. There will be discussion and activities in each session. All the written and art work the children have done will be saved and sent home in book form after the last session. Your child may be interested in sharing this "book" with you.

The group will meet once each week during the regular school day for approximately forty-five minutes. There will be a total of twelve sessions.

If you would like your son or daughter to participate in the group, please fill out the attached Parent Permission Form and have your child return it to me. I have also included a confidential questionnaire. It is not necessary to fill this out, but if your son or daughter will be joining the group, the information asked for helps me to understand the issues with which your child is dealing. I will be the only person to see the responses. The "Tips for Parents" handout is for you to keep. It includes recommendations that hopefully will be helpful to you.

If you have any questions regarding the program, please feel free to contact me by calling _____. I look forward to working with your child and helping him or her through this difficult life experience.

Sincerely,

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TEACHER NOTIFICATION FORM

Date: _____

To: _____

From: _____

The student(s) listed below will be participating in a Children of Divorce support group. The group will meet once each week on the following day, _____, at the following time,_____. The group will last for twelve weeks and will meet in the _____ office. The first session will be held on _____.

Student Names:

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Appendix E

Name _____ Date _____

YOUR RIGHTS AS AN INDIVIDUAL R3-7

As individuals we all have rights. That is, we can expect to be treated in certain ways and have certain privileges.

- We are all entitled to courtesy and respect from others.
- We should be able to participate in decisions that affect our lives.
- We should be able to express our thoughts and concerns to those around us.
- We should be given information that affects our lives.

As an individual you should protect your rights. You need to do two things to accomplish this:

1. You need a clearly defined idea of what your rights are.
2. You need to be an effective communicator so that you can tell others when you feel your rights are being infringed upon.

Protecting your rights:

1. lets others know that you do not like the way you are being treated.
2. lets others know that you will defend yourself if you feel the situation is unfair.
3. establishes a standard for future interactions.

When you fail to protect your rights:

1. you may lose privileges or have less control over your life.
2. you may experience anger or lowered self-esteem.
3. you increase the likelihood that you will be treated unfairly again.

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Name _____ Date _____

PERSONAL RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE R3-8

1. You have the right to ask to see each of your parents.
2. You have the right to talk to each of your parents on the phone as often as you like.
3. You have the right to refuse to deliver unkind messages from one parent to another.
4. You have the right to request private time with your parents without their boyfriends or girlfriends (husbands or wives).
5. You have the right to spend time with a visiting parent even if it isn't in the divorce decree.
6. You have the right to see all of your grandparents even if your parents don't like them.
7. You have the right to ask people (a parent, grandparent, or stepparent) to stop talking badly about the absent parent.
8. You have the right to leave any situation in which people refuse to stop talking badly about the absent parent.
9. You have the right to buy cards or gifts for any of your relatives (aunts, uncles, grandparents, stepparents, siblings, stepsiblings).
10. You have the right to request to live with a different parent.
11. You have the right to keep things to yourself (privacy).
12. You have the right to say "Don't ask me who I love more."
13. You have the right to refuse to spy on one parent for the other parent.
14. You have the right to talk about things that may bother you with such appropriate individuals as school guidance personnel or your minister.
15. Know what constitutes physical and sexual abuse—you have the right to avoid abuse.
16. You have the right to discuss your reasons for not wanting to see a parent.
17. You have the right to request a change in the visitation schedule if it interferes with such things as school activities or a part-time job.
18. You have the right to like your stepparents and stepsiblings.

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This article is a look at short-and long-range effects and behavioral changes of children of divorce.